



2018 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team Award

Each year since 1962, the Secretary of Defense has honored installations, teams, and individuals for outstanding conservation achievements, innovative environmental practices, and partnerships that improve quality of life and promote efficiencies without compromising the Department of Defense's (DoD) mission success. The 2018 Secretary of Defense Environmental Awards cycle encompasses an achievement period from October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2017 (Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-2017). A diverse panel of 63 judges with relevant expertise representing Federal and state agencies, academia, and the private sector evaluated all nominees to select one winner for each of the nine categories that cover six subject areas: natural resources conservation, environmental quality, sustainability, environmental restoration, cultural resources management, and environmental excellence in weapon system acquisition.

About the Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team Award

The Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team award recognizes individuals and teams for efforts to promote the conservation of natural resources, including the identification, protection, and restoration of biological resources and habitats; the sound long-term management and use of the land and its resources; support of the military readiness mission; and the promotion of a conservation ethic. Protecting endangered plant and animal species on our installations and other DoD lands ensures the preservation of these valuable environmental assets for current and future generations and assures the availability of these resources to sustain military readiness. The 2018 winner of the Natural Resources Conservation, Individual/Team award is the *Natural Resources Conservation Team, Naval Base Ventura County, California*.

About the Natural Resources Conservation Team, Naval Base Ventura County, California

Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC), California, is comprised of three primary operating facilities: Port Hueneme, Point Mugu, and San Nicolas Island (SNI). Point Mugu and Port Hueneme are both located along the Pacific coastline in southwestern Ventura County, while SNI is one of eight Channel Islands and lies 60 miles west of the coast. NBVC provides airfield, seaport, and base support services to fleet operating forces and shore activities. The Base employs more than 20,060 military and civilian personnel, over 80 tenant commands and departments to support diverse military missions. The Natural Resources Conservation Team (NRCT) implements three integrated natural resource management plans (INRMPs) as the basis for managing natural resources while accomplishing NBVC's military mission in a sustainable manner. In addition, the team oversees 21 Environmental Program Requirements, or individual programs supporting the goals and objectives described in the INRMPs, with a combined average annual operating budget of approximately \$1.7 million.



The NRCT at NBVC serves a vital role in supporting the installation's mission as a major aviation shore command and Naval Construction Force mobilization base. Pictured from left to right: Francesca Ferrara (Natural Resource Specialist), William Hoyer (Natural Resource Specialist), Martin Ruane (Ecologist), Joseph Montoya (Supervisory Physical Scientist), and Valerie Vartanian (Natural Resource Specialist). U.S. Navy photo by Natural Resource Specialist, William Hoyer.

Major Accomplishments in FY 2016-2017

- The NRCT partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in a first ever Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to facilitate planning and to protect NBVC assets from sea level rise, a national security issue for the Navy and a significant challenge for NRCT in accomplishing its mission. This MOA will serve as a model agreement for other military installations experiencing sea level rise.
- The NRCT partnered with the Naval Facilities Engineering and Expeditionary Warfare Center to test the use of Unmanned Aerial Systems to monitor the nesting activity of the federally-endangered California least tern. Point Mugu is home to one of the five largest least tern colonies in the state, and incorporating cutting-edge technologies such as these Unmanned Aerial Systems has the potential to improve conservation management beyond NBVC.
- The team stabilized erosion near mission-critical infrastructure to improve water quality and the management of storm water runoff to meet regulatory standards. This work created habitat for endemic species such as the SNI fox and SNI night lizard.
- NBVC represents about 25% of the potential habitat available for the endangered Light-footed Ridgway's rail in California. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Partner's program provided grant funding to build and deploy 15 nesting platforms in cooperation with the Girl Scouts of America and the NRCT. Rail visitation has been documented on six platforms, in addition to other rare species, such as the California salt marsh shrew and the South coast marsh vole.
- As part of the Project Review Board (PRB), the NRCT helped review more than 1,000 projects requiring over 400 Categorical Exclusions. By working within the PRB framework, proposed project actions progressed more quickly as the NRCT provided guidance in the planning phase, resulting in fewer Clean Water Act permits and Endangered Species Act consultations.
- The NRCT entered into a tripartite agreement with TNC and the National Park Service to jointly fund and hire a biologist solely focused on monitoring each of the Channel Islands for biosecurity impacts. This partnership saves the Navy 60% of the cost for a full-time biologist.



The first MQ-4C Triton Unmanned Aerial Vehicle assigned to Unmanned Patrol Squadron One Nine (VUP-19) Detachment Point Mugu, known as "Big Red" arriving at NBVC. The installation implemented a pilot study in FY 2016 and FY 2017 to investigate the use of unmanned aircraft systems to collect aerial monitoring imagery of a federally-endangered California least tern colony at Point Mugu. U.S. Navy photo by Public Affairs Specialist, Theresa Miller.



NBVC - Point Mugu has over 2,000 acres of jurisdictional wetlands, including the Mugu Lagoon, which provides habitat for thousands of migratory bird species, as well numerous invertebrate, fish, and plant species. The NRCT reviews proposed projects that have a potential to impact this valuable habitat. Efforts, such as flagging wetland boundaries, bird nesting surveys, and other monitoring activities are vital to protecting these resources while supporting construction projects and testing or demonstration activities at Point Mugu. U.S. Navy photo by Natural Resource Specialist, Francesca Ferrara.